



Preservation with an eye on affordable housing

The Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services plans to transform Parkis Avenue into 106 affordable condominiums and apartments.

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PROVIDENCE -- When prosperous businessman John Parkis sought to make a home in the city in 1857, he selected a large plat on the South Side. During the 1870s and 1880s, he sold off parcels to South Providence owners of stockyards and meat-packing plants.

The street with the huge Victorian homes with mansard roofs and intricate designs was named Parkis Avenue. Gates were erected on each end of the street and residents took pride in their homes.

While many of the houses still remain, neglect, a dying economy and decay have left them as blighted reminders what used to be.

One community agency is leading an initiative to change that.

Officials from the Greater Elmwood Neighborhood Services held a news conference yesterday to announce their plan to transform Parkis Avenue and vacant lots nearby into 106 affordable condominiums and apartments.

In addition to providing much-needed housing, their aim is also to restore community pride along the street, according to Cynthia Langlykke, the agency's executive director. The area of the project is between Elmwood Avenue and Broad Street, near St. Joseph Hospital.

The project qualified for state and federal preservation tax credits because of its past, which was highlighted by Sen. Lincoln Chafee and Ted Sanderson, director of the state Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission.

The first phase, which will cost an estimated \$4 million, will create 16 condominiums in the existing houses. The second phase will create 42 units of rental housing on vacant lots and lots nearby.

The third phase, which is still being developed, will include 48 more affordable rental units, she said.

The final phase is expected to be completed in 2008; the entire project is expected to cost about \$20 million, she said.

Langlykke predicted that the project would turn some of the city's worst housing into some of its best.

"The qualities of Parkis -- the impressive architecture and central location -- are those that invite gentrification," Langlykke said. "But through careful planning with the city

and the state, the housing will be preserved as affordable. We are thrilled to be able to save the street for the neighborhood."

The condominiums, which will include one-, two- and three-bedroom designs, will sell for as low as \$95,000, making them affordable to residents who earn \$28,000. They will include new kitchens and bathrooms, new heating systems and modern plumbing and electrical systems.

Mayor David N. Cicilline joined the cadre of speakers who praised Greater Elmwood and said a thriving city economy depends upon housing for people and families of all incomes.

While the city's community development agencies and private contractors last year created scores of affordable housing units, Cicilline said the work must continue.

Sanderson praised the project for using historic tax credits to preserve "the beauty and character of this century-old neighborhood."

The project is being made possible by a variety of sources, including Rhode Island Housing, NeighborWorks America, the City of Providence, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, The Washington Trust Co., Bank of America, Neighborhood Housing Services of America-CDFI and the Urban Revitalization Fund.

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